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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7280
INFO RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 4912
RUEHNEH/AMCONSUL HYDERABAD 0769
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 4123
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 3954

UNCLAS NEW DELHI 001364

SIPDIS

DS/CR/OCI FOR GALEN NACE
DS/CR/VPAU FOR TIM LONGANACRE AND YVETTE COLMAN
CA/FPP FOR JILL NYSTROM, PLEASE PASS TO DHS
HSTC FOR WAYNE MAY AND ALEX COOPER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFRD](#) [CVIS](#) [ASEC](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: LIONS CLUB LETTERS A TICKET TO USA?

11. SUMMARY: Interviewing hundreds wishing to attend the 2009 Lions Clubs International convention in Minneapolis, post personnel identified several significant fraud indicators. FPU and ARSO-I personnel isolated four applicants with completely fraudulent supporting packages. After those applicants were arrested and confessed, follow-up research indicated multiple issuances to non-members. Due to lax document controls by the organization, post personnel were able to generate false invitation letters, including for Osama bin Laden, directly from the international website. A conversation with the Lions' senior regional official underscored our concern about the lack of oversight of their materials. END SUMMARY.

12. A large number of applications made by ostensible Lions Club members for travel to the 2009 convention (July 6-10 in Minneapolis) raised concerns when many applicants were refused with little demonstrable knowledge of the group and/or limited time as members. Joint FPU/ARSO-I investigation identified four applicants on one day with completely fraudulent packages. They were arrested and confessed to having purchased all their materials (including Lions Club letters) from touts.

13. Subsequent investigation highlighted further questionable applications, and a crosscheck with membership rolls provided by the organization identified more than a dozen applicants who had received visas and were not members. FPU/ARSO-I personnel are following up on possible ineligibilities/revocations for these applicants.

14. Lions Clubs International Secretary Neville Mehta came to post June 29 for further discussions about our concerns. He has regional responsibility for India, South Asia, and East Africa and plans to attend the convention in Minneapolis. Conoff provided a letter from the Charg d'Affaires noting the damage to the Clubs' reputation caused by the fraudulent applications.

15. DRSO/I pointed out the ease with which a "signed" and personalized invitation letter was generated on the Lions Clubs website (www.lionsclubs.org/EN/news-and-events/international-convention-for-attendees/convention-letter.php), offering membership confirmation for Osama bin Laden and several Embassy employees. Likewise, interviews of regional officials of the Lions organization revealed that they were giving out letterhead for signature without any control of their documentation. Some members joined (and potentially even some clubs were created) with nothing more than immigration purposes in mind. Senior Lions officials from the state of Punjab stated in interviews with DRSO/I that many members join clubs like the Lions or Rotary International for the sole purpose of going abroad.

16. Mehta acknowledged that travel agents/touts were taking advantage of the convention as a possible route for intending

immigrants. He indicated the organization would be working to identify such agents and would "blacklist" them. The organization would consider actions discontinuing the membership of any officials associated with the scam and the lack of security over materials. He also stated that our concerns would be raised at the highest levels of the organization at its upcoming annual meeting.

17. All agreed in future to maintain open channels of communication. The next U.S.-based Lions Clubs International convention is in 2011, to be held in Seattle, Washington.

BURLEIGH